

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 26562

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJECT: MUSLIM PROTEST IN PATTANI

REF: (A) SONGKHLA 221, (B) SONGKHLA 223

SUMMARY. THAI-MUSLIM PROTEST IN PATTANI OVER RECENT DILLINGS (REFTELS) CONTINUES TO MAKE HEADLINES. DEMONSTRATORS THREATENING VIOLENCE IF THEIR DEMANDS ARE NOT MET. MUSLIM ORTANIZATIONS ARE PRESSURING PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT TO BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN PROTEST, BUT HE IS AVOIDING THIS FOR THE PRESENT. NON-MUSLIM ACTIVISTS IN BANGKOK ARE SIDING WITH THE PROTESTORS BUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT APPEARS TO BE MINOR. END SUMMARY.

1. THE THAI MUSLIM PROTEST IN PATTANI (DESCRIBED IN REFTELS) CONTINUES TOM MAKE FRONT PAGE HEADLINES IN ALL OF THE THAI, CHINESE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPERS. MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY ARE MAKING A CONCERTED EFFORT TO USE THE EVENTS IN PATTANI TO FOCUS PUBLIC ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE MUSLIM MINORITY IN THAILAND. ON SUNDAY DECEMBER 21 BANGKOK'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY HELD A PRAYER SERVICE AT THE MUSLIM CENTER OF THAILAND FOR THOSE WHO DIED IN THE RECENT INCIDENTS IN THE SOUTH.

2. DEMONSTRATORS IN PATTANI HAVE REPEATEDLY THREATENED TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE IF PRIME HINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT DOES NOT MEET WITH THEM TO DISCUSS THEIR PROBLEMS BY 5:00 P.M. DECEMBER 22. DECEMBER 21 NEWSPAPERS REPORTED HAT SEVEN MAJOR MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS SENT A
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CABLE TO KHUKRIT, CURRENTLY ON A REST HOLIDAY IN LAMPANG, URGING

HIM TO HAVE A PERSONEL HEETING WITH THE PROTESTORS. A MUSLIM SPOKE-MAN WAS REPORTEE TO HAVE SAID LAST WEEK THAT KHUKRIT IS THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN PROVIDE A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS. (COMMENT: THE PROTESTORS ARE MAKING A CONCERTED EFFORT TO GET KHUKRIT PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN THIS ISSUE. THIS WOULD NOT ONLY GIVE THEIR COMPLAINTS WIDER RECOGNITION, BUT WOULD PUT KHUKRI ON THE SPOT AND PERHAPS FORCE HIM TO MAKE MORE FAVORABLE CONCESSIONS THAN A LOWER LEPEL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL MIGHT. KHUKRIT HAS SO FAR BEEN RELUCTANT TO BECOME INVOLVED AT ALL. END COMMENT.)

3. KHUKRIT IS EVIDENTLY UNMOVED BY THE PROTESTORS' THREATS. COL. PRAKOP PRAYUNPHOKKHARAT, THE DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER WHO LED AN UNSUCCESSFUL GOVERNMENT MISSION TO PATTANI EARLY LAST WEEK, ANNOUNCED THAT KHUKRIT "IS NOT WELL" AND WON'T BE ABLE TT SEE MUSLIM PROTESTORS HE SAID THAT ANY GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE SHOULD BE ABLE TO HANDLE THE PROBLEM.

4. BANGKOK BASED LEFT-WING ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING NATIONAL

STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND AND ANTI-DICTATORSHIP FRONT), EVER VIGILANT FOR A NEW ISSUE, ARE TRYING TO GET IN ON THE ACTION. THE GOVERNMENT IS ALSO MAKING FAMILIAR NOISES ABOUT OUTSIDERS INTER-

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FERING IN THE MATTER AND MISLEADING THE PROTESTORS. FROM BANGKOK, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT INVOLVEMENT BY NON-MUSLIM ACTIVISTS WILL REMAIN MINOR. COMMENT: THE RTG HAS ADOPTED A WAIT AND SEE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SITUATION IN PATTANI, AND MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE PROTESTORS AND THEIR LEADERS. THE CURRENT DIFFICULTIES WITH MUSLIM MINORITIES ARE A SYMPTOM OF A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS PROBLEM WHICH THE RTG WILL HAVE TO FACE UP TO SOONER OR LATER. THAI PERFORMANCE TO DATE ON COMPLAINTS OF MUSLIM MINORITY HAS BEEN GRUDGING AND UNIMAGIMATIVE AND HAS SIMPLY NOT SATISFIED CONCERNS WHICH MUSLIMS CONSIDER FULLY JUSTIFIED. WHITEHOUSE

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